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The Oral Political Traditions  
of Rowan County

KENTUCKY GOVERNMENT  
1:50 T-T-F  
Mr. George T. Young

By:

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## I

The purpose of this paper is to put down on paper the oral political traditions of Rowan County Kentucky. Oral political traditions consist of stories, jokes, riddles, poems, songs and any other thing handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

I received permission from five men, who have lived most of their adult lives in Rowan County. I gave each man the outline of the paper to let them see what it was that I wanted from them. Then several days later I interviewed the individual. The following material is the oral political traditions that I have been able to obtain from the five informants.

## II

My first informant was Mr. Ralph Boyd. Mr. Boyd is fifty-four years old and lives in Morehead. He has been involved in Rowan County politics for many years.

The first story Mr. Boyd told me goes like this:

George, as we will refer to him, was arrested for public ~~drunkenness~~ drunkenness, and when his trial was over the Judge asked George if he would promise to stop drinking he would

suspend his sentence. But George replied, Judge you just a drunk trying a drunk, send me on down the road the sooner I go, the sooner I'll get back."

The second story Mr. Boyd related to men goes along these lines.

"Two men running for County judge in a tight election were getting to the point where they would do anything to win. One candidate found a man who looked like his opponent. The day before the election they put a suit of clothes on the impostor and got him drunk, placed him in the back seat of a car and drove him around the County, stopped frequently to let the people see their next County Judge. This was not the real candidate but it caused the real candidate to lose the election".

These were the only two oral political traditions Mr. Boyd could recall.

## III

My second informant was Mr. Woodford Black. He has been an active member of Pican County politics.

The first story Mr. Black told me goes like this.

"A candidate running for Sheriff had a large number of posters of himself holding a broom. He said throughout his campaign that he was going to sweep out the courthouse spanking clean if he was elected. The people called him The Janitor and he ran a low third in the primary."

The second thing Mr. Black told me was a common belief in Pican County.

"There is a belief in Pican County that the losers in an election go up 'Salt River' to get forgiveness for voting wrong."

Another story Mr. Black gave me ~~runs~~ goes like this.

"Two men were making moonshine for the upcoming election. One day one went to get

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some water for the still while the other one stayed. While the one was away the Sheriff arrived and arrested the other and took him to jail. The other man came to see the one in jail and said "I know you was going to get in trouble because of that Moonshine still of yours."

This is all the information Mr. Black could remember and could relate to me.

## II

My next informant was Mr. Oscar Patrick. He gave me some common beliefs of Rowan County. The first goes like this.

"People of Rowan County believe that the vote seller & the vote buyer are the ~~most~~ most dishonorable creatures that breathe."

A second common belief Mr. Patrick told me concerns the weather on the day of the election and the result of the election.

"If election day is clear it means clear sailing for the Democrats, but if it is a cloudy day the next few days will ~~be~~ be cloudy for the Democrats."

A joke Mr. Patuck told me goes like this.

"A County Judge and one of his friends went out in the middle of a big corn field and got so drunk they couldn't even stand up. The lightning bugs started flashing all around and one asked the other 'where we at' and the other replied 'Don't you see the lights, we're in the middle of Louisville.'"

There are all the political traditions Mr. Patuck could recall at the time of the interview.

## I

My next informant was Mr. Walter Black. I chose to interview him because he has lived in Roan County for many years and has taken an active part in the political life of Roan County.

The first story Mr. Black told me goes like this.

"On election day Uncle Bob the Mountaineer came into the town to vote. On his way through the woods a thunder shower came up, and he hid in a hollow tree to stay dry. Several hunters came along and seeing something move in the tree they rolled a big ~~the~~ sack over the opening in the tree. Uncle Bob said the only way out of the tree was a small knot hole. When he was asked how he got out Uncle Bob replied smiling 'I just thought of voting Republican and I felt so small I crawled out the knot hole.'"

A second story Mr. Black told me goes like this.

"A republican went to the polls to vote but hadn't decided which way he would vote. After thinking a while he



he went into the booth and looked straight at the log cabin and pulled the lever above it. He hit the lever so hard that when it made a line of x's down the ticket it made the fire fly from the chimney and burned all the feathers ~~for~~ off the rooster."

Another little story Mr. Black told to me has to do with the passage of the five percent sales tax.

"After the five percent sales tax was passed by the legislature, the blame was placed on Governor Munro. I overheard one man remark 'It's been twenty-four years since Ky. has had a Republican Governor and now it's going to be twenty-four more.'"

These three stories were all Mr. Black could recall. Like most of my other informants he could not give a date of origin or a title by which they were commonly known.

VI

My last informant was Mr. Bill Thomas. Mr. Thomas is actively involved in Rowan County's politics. He has lived in Rowan County all of his fifty years. The first story Mr. Thomas told me goes like this.

"A former County Judge was holding trial of a woman for some offense. In the course of the trial, the woman became angry at the Judge for his continual pounding of his gavel. The woman jumped up and yelled, 'If you don't stop pounding that thing I'll knock you in the head with it.' She did just that and it took two Sheriff's deputies to save the County Judge"

Mr. Thomas was at the trial and witnessed the account given above.

The next story he told me was another former County Judge. It goes like this:

"The Judge would come in and open the Court House every morning at 8:00. He said

State law required the  
the County Judges Office  
be open from 8 am to  
4 P.M. but he also said  
No law required him to  
be in his office."

Mr. Thomas gave me a definition  
of a common political term.

"A professional vote  
seller is clever enough  
to make it look like  
he isn't selling his  
vote. On Election Day  
he says he has to  
work, and to quite  
work & go vote would  
lose him some money  
and he should be  
~~reimbursed~~ reimbursed for  
his time lost."

This is all Mr. Thomas could  
give me in the oral political  
tradition of Rowan County. He could  
not recall any common title  
given to the Stays on any  
date of origin.

VII

In conclusion to my research report of the oral political traditions of Rowan County, I feel that there is much more which has been lost to time. There are many stories which have not been passed down to the people I have talked to.

I contacted several people who would not even talk to me. They told me they didn't have the time to talk about politics.

My analysis of the oral political tradition is that the people can't remember the person who told them the story or the time it was told to them. Also the dates of origin of the stories have been forgotten in all the times it has been passed down to another individual.